



Annual Impact Report



United Communities
The best in everyone™



Welcome

Something has shifted...

This year has marked a significant milestone for United Communities, as we became a registered charity. Our activity has also grown: this year we have supported the development of 22 school-linked community hubs across our network, funded 8 youth and community-led initiatives, nurtured self-organised regional networks, supported schools and Trusts beyond United Learning, and deepened our work through the invaluable collaboration of our new and long-term partners. We are building capacity both locally and at the centre as the scope and reach of our activity grows.

As our work develops, we are beginning to see what's possible when schools re-imagine their role – not only as educators, but as neighbours, convenors, facilitators and stewards of community life. The schools in our network are increasingly working alongside communities to co-create spaces of belonging, learning and shared purpose. Relationships between schools and communities are deepening, and residents are increasingly taking the lead. From enterprising children launching the UK's youngest Your Local Pantry, to the reopening of a much-loved youth and community centre, examples of collective action have sent ripples of connection, trust and possibility across entire neighbourhoods.

This work is neither quick nor easy. It asks us to slow down, listen deeply, and follow what emerges. We invite schools to embrace uncertainty, open their doors, connect with life beyond the school gates and build relationships with local people. The community hubs we support are becoming places where trust is built, local people lead their own change and long-term, community-driven transformation can take root.

United Communities hubs are helping to create environments where education and community development grow together – rooted in relationships, shared purpose, and the everyday contributions of local people. They support learning in its broadest sense, connecting people of all ages through opportunities to participate, lead, and shape the future of their communities.

There is still a long way to go. But the energy, creativity, and leadership already emerging show the potential of school-linked community hubs. Early evidence suggests this work is contributing positively to both community and educational priorities – including wellbeing, health, connection, belonging, school attendance, and stronger relationships between schools and families.

This report offers a glimpse into what has begun to take shape. We invite you to read the stories, reflect on what could be possible – and consider how you might be part of it.

Charlie, Martina, Ellie and Sally, **United Communities**

Who we are

United Communities is an independent charity, established in 2025 by United Learning – a group of over 100 schools across England – to deepen and expand the community development work that began in 2022. United Communities is part of the United Learning group and will continue to benefit from a close relationship with the group's education-focused charities. Its Board, which met for the first time in May 2025, is chaired by Rania Marandos. Trustees bring a wide range of experience from the education, wider public, commercial and third sectors.

The initial focus of United Communities is delivering United Learning's commitment to establish a community hub in every cluster by the end of 2025-26. We are clear that this is just the beginning of our journey. Our ambition is to cultivate a sustainable, evolving network that continues to grow and deepen its impact well beyond this initial milestone. We look forward to setting out how we will do this in our long-term strategy, which will be developed over the course of this year.



Who we are

United Communities supports schools to act as good neighbours and to contribute to stronger, more connected communities. Our core focus is the development of school-linked community hubs and the convening of the national United Communities network.

We work alongside schools to build on the strengths already present within their communities – supporting them to listen well, form meaningful relationships, and collaborate with others to take locally-led, collective action.

Our approach is guided by a flexible and scalable framework rooted in asset-based community development. It centres on discovering, connecting, and mobilising existing community assets to enable sustainable, neighbourhood-level change.

Community hubs are supported with the infrastructure, expertise, and resources they need to enable them to grow and develop. This includes tailored training and development, membership of the United Communities network, seed funding for community-led projects, access to a shared evaluation and learning framework, and a network of aligned partners – all of which is co-designed with members to reflect local strengths and priorities.

This year, we supported the development of 22 community hubs – 13 now considered established, and 9 in the early stages of growth. Interest in our three-year community hub development programme continues to grow. From September 2025, 30 schools – including several outside the United Learning network – will begin their journey toward developing locally-rooted hubs, supported through our bespoke Cradle to Career partnership with the Reach Foundation.





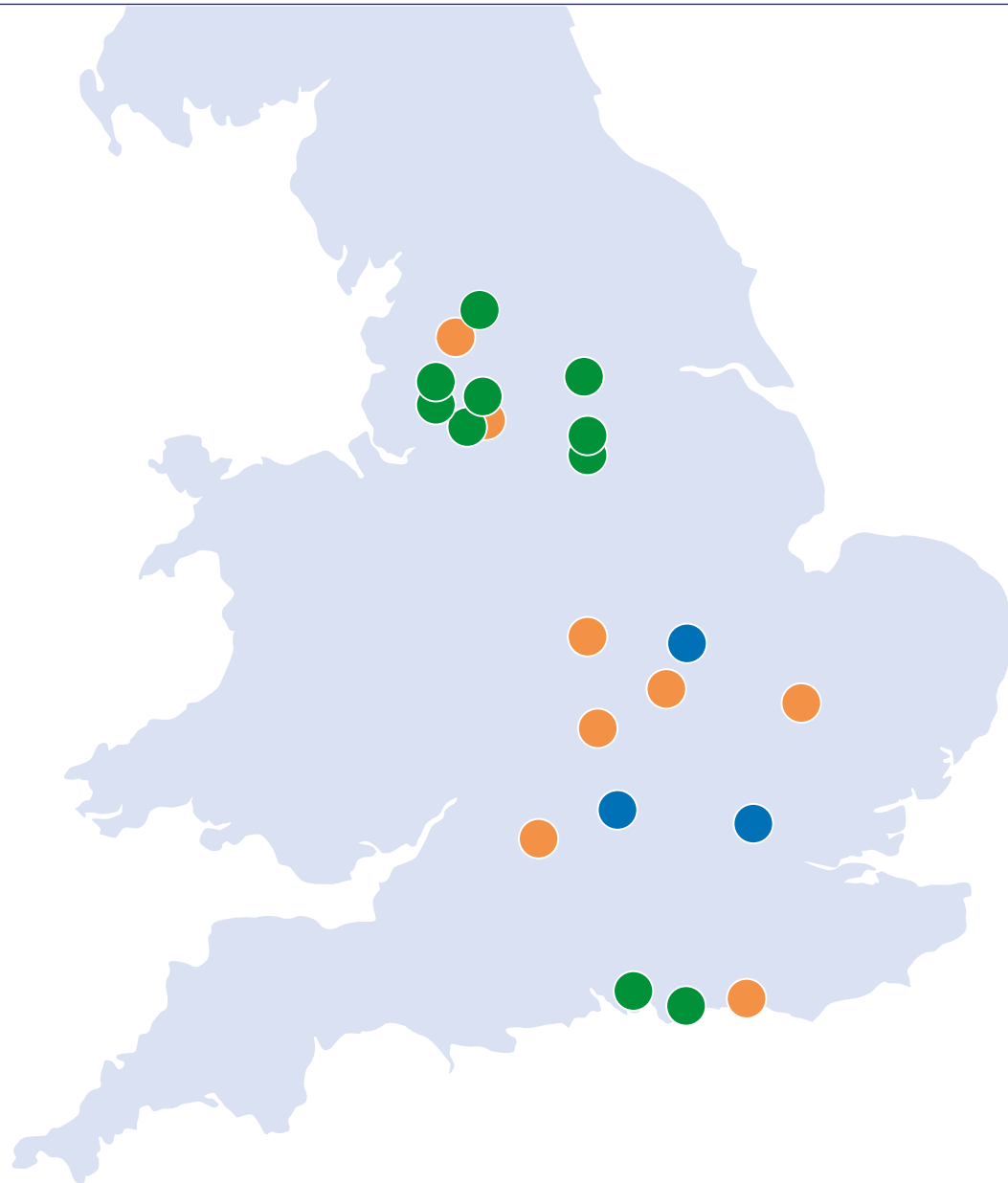
Community Hubs

United Communities' network of community hubs offer welcoming, inclusive spaces where local people come together to share skills, exchange resources, and build stronger neighbourhoods. Delivery is collaborative – led by local residents (including children and young people), partner organisations, and/or the community hub staff.

Each hub is rooted in its local context – shaped by residents and supported by cross-sector partnerships that champion community-led change. Examples of community hub initiatives include youth clubs, parent/carer and child groups, interest-based groups, lifelong learning, sports and leisure activities, community pantries, SEND support groups, community allotments, and grassroots initiatives.

Community hubs are located across England, often in neighbourhoods where the effects of structural inequality are most visible. In these areas, United Learning schools have committed to playing a supportive role, working alongside residents to strengthen local networks and unlock community potential.

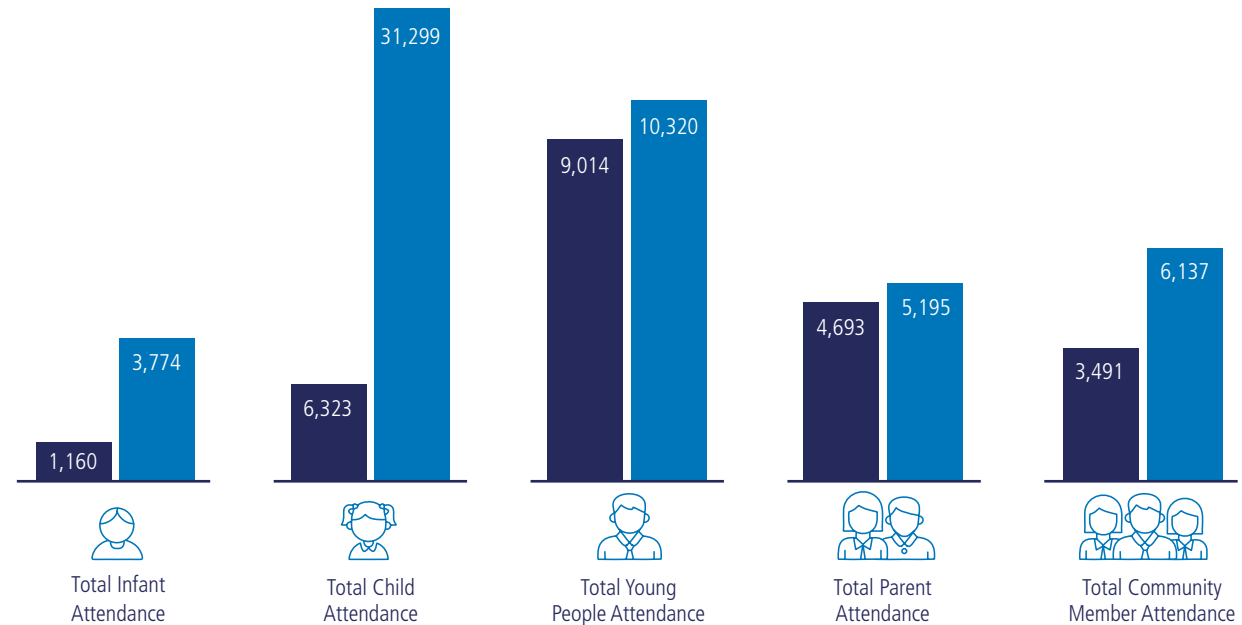
● Established hubs ● Developing hubs ● Run by external charities



Our Data

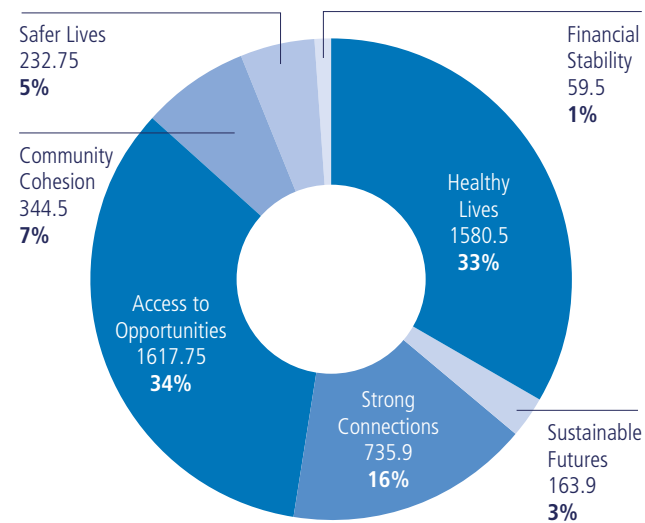
In 2024–25, hubs saw over **56,700** attendances, reflecting the energy, connection, and community building activity taking place across our network. Here's the breakdown of participation by group:

■ 2023/24
■ 2024/25



Community activities

This year, community hubs developed sustainable food hubs, nurtured shared allotments, established youth clubs, and welcomed local associations and organisations to share space on the school site. Collectively, community hubs facilitated **over 1,550 community activities, across over 4,700 hours (more than double last year's figure)**, bringing together a diverse range of local strengths and resources. These hours were concentrated across areas of shared focus, as seen to the right.



Support linked to financial stability and sustainable futures is often embedded within wider community-led activity and not recorded separately.

Partnership development

This work thrives through collaboration, and hubs are encouraged to build strong connections with local organisations. Over the past year, **more than 100 partnerships have been formed**.

As a result, last year, at least **34% of activities** delivered across hubs involved from partner organisations.

Our Data

Local people

We support hubs to invite and support contribution from residents – including children, young people, families, and neighbours – who bring their time, ideas, and energy to shared community activity.

Over the past year, more than **1,800 hours** were contributed by local people, reflecting the everyday leadership, creativity, and care that drive each hub forward.

We saw an increase of **136%** in participation compared to 2023-24 showing the scalability of this work, as well as strong engagement in our hubs' activities.

All hubs conduct listening conversations and invite people from the wider community.

As a result, community member attendance to our hubs increased by:

76%





Our Studies

Our evaluation and learning framework combines studies and stories within a longitudinal approach, enabling us to understand short- and long-term impact through data and the lived experiences of those engaged in community-led activity.

We are seeing emerging evidence of impact on educational outcomes – and on proxy indicators that affect educational outcomes – including attendance, suspension rates, relationships between parents and schools, and perceptions of school reputation.

In November 2024, we commissioned Curating Connections to conduct independent research with several community hubs and schools, exploring the emerging evidence relating to how hubs may be supporting stronger parental engagement and improved school attendance. The study focused on three schools that have been embedding asset-based approaches to community development.

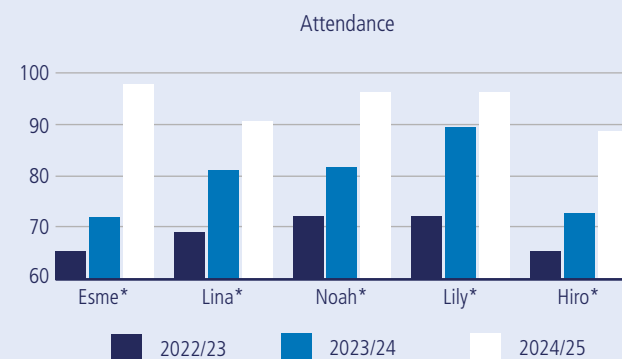
The report found:

- Intentional relational practice was identified as a key contributing factor to improving parental engagement. This was further realised when embedded into the school ethos and culture.

- By leading with relational practice and community building, forms of intervention (where required) are arranged in collaboration with families, and received and understood in a better way.
- This work takes time and patience – capacity is a key factor to ensuring that community hub initiatives and a relational approach are sustained.

We intend to continue to monitor these themes in our hubs over the next few years.

Beacon View Primary Academy's community development journey began in 2022–23 by gently building connections with parents and carers at the school gates – a natural gathering place during drop-off. These everyday encounters created space for deep listening, where families could share their stories of community life, their skills, and aspirations. Through SEND coffee groups, shared meals, and co-created activities, families were welcomed into shaping the emerging community hub – helping to nurture trust and belonging, and gradually weaving stronger relationships between families and the school. With a relational approach, the school has noticed improvements in other educational priorities: the attendance of all pupils has improved, and persistent absence has more than halved. The graph below shows the attendance of 5 pupils at the school, whose attendance significantly improved following the community hub development. This is a trend we are seeing in other community hubs, and one we will continue to monitor over time.



*Names of students have been changed

Our Stories

The Ripple Effect of United Communities

Change rarely unfolds in isolation. As we reflect on the impact of our work, we're seeing how small, community-rooted actions spark broader shifts – known as ripple effects.

The following stories highlight how local assets, relationships and leadership can drive sustainable, community-led change.





Employment: Unlocking potential through shared skills

At Marlborough Community Hub in Salford, a health and wellbeing working group became a catalyst for community-led growth.

In partnership with Ethnic Health Forum (EHF), the hub supported women from minority ethnic backgrounds to access health information. This led to the creation of a weekly women's group, where yoga emerged as a shared interest. Initially, a female instructor provided by EHF led a session, but was unable to continue. In response, a resident – recently arrived from India and an experienced yoga practitioner – stepped forward to lead subsequent classes. Her contribution transformed a temporary gap into a regular, community-owned activity, showcasing the power of lived experience and local talent.

Recognising her leadership, EHF offered her a sessional role, which later led to formal employment. This journey illustrates how community contributions can open pathways to personal and professional development.





Inspiring Future Youth Workers: A Student's Journey from Volunteering to Vocational Calling

At YouthWorks, based at Marsden Heights Community College in Nelson (Lancashire), the Positive Voices project – led by hub lead Mashuq Hussain OBE, in partnership with UCLan – has had a profound impact on students.

For Maryam, involvement in initiatives such as a healthy eating campaign, a charity walk, and representing young people's voices at local conferences, revealed a passion for youth work.

Encouraged by the hub lead and inspired by her experiences, Maryam pursued a degree apprenticeship in youth work with Onside and UCLan. What began as school-based volunteering evolved into a vocational pathway, illustrating how early exposure to community leadership can amplify young voices and shape future leaders.





Building Sustainable Partnerships: From Ad-hoc Activities to a Lasting Community Presence

At Grange Community Hub, the success of initial sessions run by Age UK has grown into a robust and far-reaching partnership. Originally leasing a single room for a few hours each week, Age UK have established a partnership to run the hub four days a week from September, offering a comprehensive programme of support for all ages.

This expanded initiative will include practical assistance with everyday challenges, exercise classes, creative activities, and social outings – all delivered by trained staff and volunteers. This evolution reflects how early collaboration can lead to sustainable, community-rooted infrastructure.

The hub will also host adult education through Thresham College, offering academic and life skills courses that respond to local aspirations. These developments build on the foundations laid over the past three years, ensuring the hub remains a dynamic and responsive local asset for the community.





Rebuilding Trust: From School-Led to Resident-Owned

In Paulsgrove, the initial vision for a community hub was centred around a school-led facility. However, with the support of United Communities, this vision evolved into a genuinely community-owned initiative. By shifting from a service-led to an asset-based approach, the hub fostered trust and empowered residents to take the lead.

One significant outcome has been the formation of a constituted community group, led by local residents in partnership with the school and over 50 community animators, associations, and organisations. This transformation was facilitated by the then Principal and Vikki, a dedicated community builder and hub lead, who has long-standing, strong relationships with the community.

Supported by local authority funding, the resident group will revitalise a previously vacant high street unit, creating a space for connection and collaboration. This journey – from institutional vision to community stewardship – demonstrates how local ownership can breathe new life into neighbourhoods.





Ignite Communities Fund

We dedicate a large part of our modest operational budget to seed-funding youth and community-led initiatives, through the Ignite Communities Fund. We introduced this fund in 2023 and since then have contributed £26,754 to catalysing sustainable, grassroots community activity.

The fund is designed to build on the energy and momentum already sparked by local community-building efforts. It supports hubs that have laid strong foundations, where a small amount of seed-funding can quickly mobilise community activity – especially where lengthy external funding application processes may slow momentum already gained. To be considered for funding, applications must show that the request has been designed by or with local people. Application windows are open 3 times a year and grants are made to successful applications within a week of the closing date.

In response to the success of the fund, we plan to allocate 50% of our operational project budget to the fund next year and are keen to grow it further.

In 2024-25, we funded 8 community projects, covering locally identified priorities across several outcome areas including Access to Opportunities, Healthy Lives and Community Cohesion.

Examples of projects we funded included:

- Community craft groups;
- Community wellbeing sessions;
- Community meals;
- Community gymnastics academy;
- Baby and toddler groups;
- Inclusive youth club.



The initiatives funded by Ignite often create new opportunities for connection between local children, young people, families and neighbours – providing more opportunities for listening, conversations and relationship building. One hub lead reflected that the funded initiative provided a welcoming opportunity for them to work alongside residents to act on something important to them.

Several community hubs applied to Ignite to start up playgroups with local residents, after learning through listening conversations that there weren't any that were easily accessible or affordable. In response, we contributed over £5,600 from the Ignite Communities Fund to four hubs to set up stay-and-play groups. At Hunningley Community Hub a local parent, who was helping to run the play group, successfully secured employment after volunteering with in the school's Nursery, following several years out of the workplace to care for her own children. At Dukesgate Community Hub the toddler group is now entirely run by parents and grandparents. The school has also seen an increase in applications for nursery and reception places since the hub opened, and they now have a waiting list for the first time.

Since 2023/24 we have given out

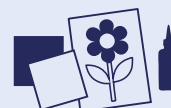
£26,754

for community hubs to turn community-led ideas into action.

In 2024/25 we funded

8 community projects

Community craft groups



Community wellbeing sessions, including soundbaths



Community gymnastics academy





What the Ignite Fund Sparked

Activities delivered through the Ignite Communities Fund last year made a meaningful difference to individuals and families, contributing to increased confidence, well-being, connections and community cohesion.

Woodland Community Hub

When a group of local women expressed interest in starting a sewing group, Woodlands Community Hub offered the space to host it. The women already had the relationships, energy, and skills to bring the group to life – including support from a local fabric shop owner who offered materials and expertise. The only missing piece was access to sewing machines. Together, they applied to Ignite for funding to purchase ten machines. With that small investment, the group has since flourished.

“

I feel happy when attending the sewing class and meeting others....Mrs Khan makes the place so special – this encourages me and others to attend courses.”

Community member

Dukesgate Community Hub



At Dukesgate Community Hub, a family crafting session supported by Ignite, created a gentle and welcoming way for local parents to engage with the hub. During the session, one parent shared that they felt disconnected from the community, and the hub lead was able to talk about other activities at the hub that might interest them. This initial connection led to ongoing involvement in the gardening project and plans to volunteer in the pop-up pantry in the following school year. The activity also offered an opportunity for families to spend quality time together.

William Hulme's Grammar School

At William Hulme's Grammar School, the Ignite Fund supported a community Iftar that brought together students, staff, and families. The funding was used to purchase a portable speaker and microphone, enhancing the atmosphere and ensuring the equipment could be used for future events. The hub lead commented that the fund was “instrumental in ensuring the success of the event.” The Iftar also fostered collaboration and pride among students and staff, with many residents commenting on how the event really brought everyone together.

“

It was great to see that a large number of students took on meaningful roles to deliver the event... All in all, it felt very special.”

Attendee



Funding

Local fundraising is essential in supporting our hubs’ activities, with guidance from our central team to help hubs access a variety of local and national funding opportunities and to secure the most suitable grants that reflect the priorities and interests of their communities. This year, our hubs have collectively raised over £262,000 to deliver community initiatives – a 92% increase compared to 2024-25.

Our hubs have also worked closely with a wide range of partners, from local charities and businesses, to national charities whose values align with our own.

As well as the time contributed by local residents every year in their communities, we are very grateful for financial support from many donors, corporate partners, grant funders and commissioners.

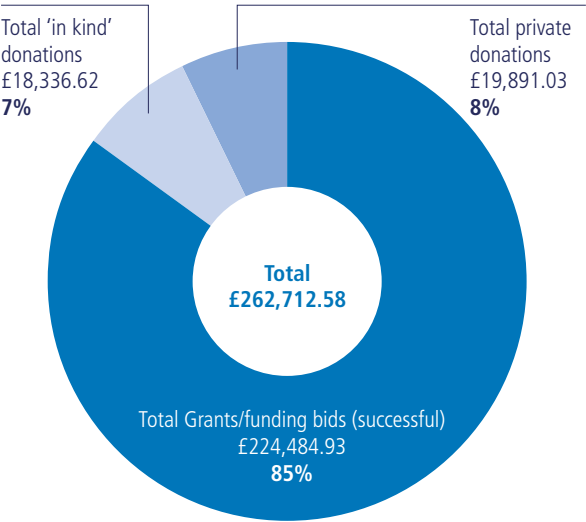
With the establishment of United Communities as a registered charity we are expanding our central fundraising efforts in support of our ambition to

deepen our community practice, to effectively resource community hubs and to build the capacity needed for the infrastructure that enables this work.

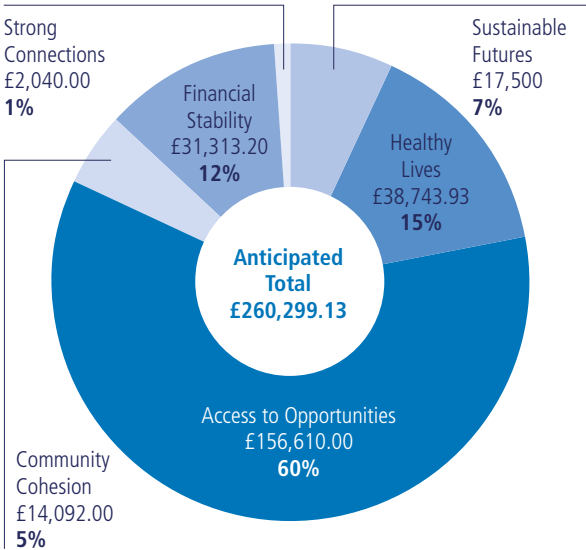
In 2024-25 there was a strong focus on access to opportunities. New opportunities that emerged included wellbeing groups, childcare courses, sports and gaming, SEND support groups, sewing groups, youth clubs.

9 This data only relates to 9 of our most established hubs.

Where the money came from



What the money will be spent on





Thank yous

This work would not be possible without the generosity, dedication, and talents of local residents, young people, community builders, as well as our central and school-based staff.

We are also grateful for the support and expertise of many organisations, who work directly with our hubs, as well as the direct support from our wonderful partners who help our shared practice to continue to grow.

Special thanks go to:

Curating Connections

Nurture Development

Reach Foundation

Wates Foundation

Wates Family Enterprise Trust

The Grace Trust

Acumen Academy UK

National Lottery

Our Creative Connection

Rapid Relief Team

Peabody Housing Association

Age UK

Your Local Pantry

The Centre for Emotional Health

Windsor Academy Trust

Barnardos

Oasis

Locality

...and many more.